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ABSTRACT

The paper describes the Supermarket Resource program at George F. McMechan School (Baltimore, Maryland), a special school for minimally intellectually limited, severely and profoundly retarded, multihandicapped hearing impaired, and multihandicapped vision impaired children (13 to 21 years old). Reviewed are program development, methods and materials used for instruction, responses of the students, and evaluation after the program's first year. Noted among program objectives are identification of a supermarket, shopping in relation to family needs and wants, and appropriate behavior in a commercial facility. (SBH)

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Supermarket Resource Teacher

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Seminar on Unique Approaches to Accomodate the Handicapped Learner

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Supermarket Resource Teacher

There is in U.S., a growing optimism about the potential skills of the handicapped,; a realization that, with special techniques, even the multihandicapped can acquire, if not independence, then independent skills which will help them function in their society. For many children, 'their' society will no longer be a large institution with little if any education or stimulation. As a result of Public Law 94.142, whose main aim is the education of all children in the 'Least Restrictive Environment', 'Mainstreaming' starts with many institutionalized children coming into the Public schools.

In Baltimore, Maryland, a new Special School for Multihandicapped opened September 1977, and its purpose was to begin the receiving and educating of such children, ages 13-21, integrating them gradually into the program with minimum intellectually limited students. In turn many of these M.I.L. would hopefully be moved later to 'their' least restrictive environment of a special class in a regular school, or to get a job in a sheltered workshop or in the community. The 'ideal' is for continuous reassessment of each child with movement when beneficial to him.

The George F. McMechan School #177 is a modified open space secondary facility, designed to serve 400 Multihandicapped students. (It has 265 at present), It is an air-conditioned, carpeted, one-story building. Home Base classes of 8-12 students are arranged in sets of three classes, mainly according to their abilities, such as Minimum Intellectually Limited (MIL), Severe and Profoundly Retarded (SPR), Multihandicapped Hearing Impaired (MHHI), and Multihandicapped Vision Impaired (MHVI) Many of these children have physical disabilities; some have poor motor

control, some need walking aids or even wheel chairs. There is also an area for the severe physically handicapped.

The special services include : a Health suite with full time nurse, part-time doctor and dentist and a speech language and hearing center where four speech therapists can work with students in individual or small group sessions.

The Resource areas include :

1. The Music room - fully enclosed and acoustically treated to isolate and control sound., with electronic piano lab. moog synthesizer , Orff instruments and a variety of melodic and percussion instruments.
2. A Science Room with contemporary lab. equipment, 15 work stations and greenhouse.
3. A Visual Arts Center with equipment to work with many materials such as wood, metal or ceramics.
4. A Media or Library Center with a full range of printed and audio-visual media..
5. A Home Economics [illegible] Center with fully equipped kitchen, laundry facilities and class instruction area.
6. An Industrial Arts Center with considerable specialized equipment for metal and wood construction, printing and electrical work .
7. Several Gymnasiums with a swimming pool, showers and lockers.

There are also the resource areas which are simulated to be replicas of daily functional living :

1. Simulated Workshop where projects using tools and assembly skills are undertaken similar in skill level to that accomplished in a sheltered workshop..
2. A simulated apartment with Kitchen and dining area, living room, bedroom bathroom and a variety of storage areas.
3. A simulated Supermarket with 5 rows of well-stocked shelves, 2 horizontal freezers, 1 upright freezer, 1 upright refrigerator, shopping carts,

2 checking out counters with the latest models of cash registers and a class instructional area. .

The aim of this presentation is to describe the program of the Supermarket Resource, how it was initiated, methods and materials used for instruction, the responses of the students and some evaluation at the end of its first year.

Living in the city demands shopping at a Supermarket for food. In the past, children or dependent adults could have gone to the local grocery store with a list and had it made up by the grocer. Now, with the Supermarket, 'self-service' is required, the shopper must select and collect his own requirements from an ever-increasing variety of items, packaged in an assortment of cans, bottles or boxes. For many items, he must also decide whether to buy them fresh, frozen, dried, or canned, and price and quantity are additional factors in the decision making.

To meet these basic needs, the simulated Supermarket was provided in the George F. McMechan School and stocked with products donated by Pantry Pride, a supermarket chain in the eastern U.S. A few weeks before school year started in September 1977, I was given the job of Supermarket Resource Teacher! It was with some apprehension that I began to consider ways of using this supermarket as a teaching tool. This was the first Supermarket in a school in the U.S., possibly in the world. There was no precedent, no curriculum on which to base the methods. The class schedules gave further concern: 6 S.P.R. classes, 3 M.H.H. classes and 3 M.H.I. would come twice per week to the Supermarket for instruction. As stated previously many of these children had never been in a public school, and most Special Education teachers had no experience of working with them, did not know of the characteristics of their handicaps, their behavior patterns or skills.

Getting to know the children, , observing them, assessing their abilities , and giving them an awareness of a Supermarket environment were the first objectives . A mother returning from the supermarket with a bag of groceries was role played. The items were named, letting the children feel them as each was taken out of the bag. The act was matched with a picture of a family coming from the supermarket and students were asked to identify items and people in the picture . We walked in groups in the supermarket area, again identifying items and returning them neatly to their shelves.. While these activities were being presented and students encouraged to participate, their reaction was noted and a continuous search was made for ways to start the program.

Already two important unexpected behavior patterns emerged which must influence the teaching techniques to be used..First, many of the children were non-verbal. To have them follow directions , alternative modes of response must be sought to enable them to demonstrate their auditory reception and comprehension. . Tasks must be given where the child could point , or show, or manipulate objects or even act out the response. . Secondly, many students could not identify the packages, simply because they lived in institutions and had never seen them. An egg to them meant an egg on the plate ready to eat and bore no relation to this carton in the refrigerator. They must be given experiences to relate the food as they knew it, with the contents and the packages..

After a few visits, we began with the aim: students will identify cornflakes and milk as suitable breakfast foods, find them in the supermarket, and complete the shopping routine in a socially approved manner. First came the concrete experiences in the class area. Here all avenues of communication were utilized to involve each child in the lesson .Here they heard , saw , touched , tasted and smelled, to identify and make real the items they were to buy in the Supermarket. They saw the real milk poured from the

carton, the real cornflakes coming from the box . They tasted them , handled the carton or box, pointed to them while simultaneously heard them named. For the deaf children , ' signs' were given. . It was total communication.

They matched the contents with the package, then moving to the abstract, they matched pictures of the packages with real packages, then pictures of the contents with pictures of the packages. A few students even managed to match the pictures with the printed name of the item . Pictures had to be clear replicas and able to withstand rough handling and drooling . The verbal named and matched, the non-verbal pointed and matched and the H.I. signed and matched. . The matching became a game in which all were eager to participate.. Language was reduced and simple . Verbal instructions were brief and enunciated clearly , in language to which the children could relate, and presented in an 'attention holding' manner .

Given play money (covered with clear contact plastic) and the verbal or signed direction to find one item , eg., 'milk' , the students did so, then on directions - paid for it at the check-out counter . The supermarket aide usually acted as check-out clerk . They then returned with the bagged item to the class area, where the shopping was evaluated, praised and shown to the class.

This then was the pattern, as more and more items or products were added for their identification and shopping practice. Within a few weeks , hot cereals, orange juice, eggs and pancakes were added to the breakfast foods. Matching activities now included several items , according to each child's abilities . Direct contact with the real items helped develop discrimination of color, shape and texture .

The sensory experiences , given in sequence from the package to the contents to the cooking and serving of the food proved especially valuable to the H.I. children, for many of the symbolic signs of the American sign

Language are directly related to the act of food preparation. For example, the sign for 'egg' comes from the breaking of the egg, and the children signed as they saw the egg broken. Even more effective was the identification of the sign for pancakes; the flipping of the pancakes in the pan performed as the children gave the sign: the initial letter 'P' flipped on the palm of the left hand.

The pattern of identification of products in the class area, then individual shopping performance in the supermarket area continued. While some students were limited to shopping with verbal direction for a single product, many students began shopping with verbal directions for two or even three items. For multiple items however, pictures of the packages or even the contents were mainly used, the students using these as their shopping lists. A few students were soon able to use word cards.

Individualization of the program to meet each child's needs was gradually increased. Based on a task analysis of shopping skills, an achievement skills chart was constructed. As each child performed a task it was recorded, whether performed independently or with assistance. Goals were reduced for some children, for whom even extending of their attention span to a few minutes, waiting at the check-out counter, or guiding a shopping cart in the aisles, was real progress.

By the end of December, however, many of these children - S.P.R, M.H.H.I., and M.H.V.I. - had acquired new skills of communication and performance of the shopping task. Many could shop independently in a socially approved manner. Teachers and aides agreed that the students responded well in the Supermarket Resource and enjoyed this new experience.

In the Spring semester, schedules were changed to allow other classes to benefit from the Supermarket Resource. Most of the classes were now M.I.L. students - the upper level students of the school. They had now been with their Home Room teachers for several months and I was able

to use the teacher's knowledge of the student's performance to complete a skills check list. This list provided a baseline from which I could start a program for each child. Some of these students while still low in academic skills, were more socially mature and moved independently in the city. They protested at first that they could shop in the supermarket and it was soon found that they could easily perform the physical act of shopping for limited items / Performance in language, money, and other skills was still poor however and needed improvement. Lessons had to be tailored to meet their needs of self-esteem and adult independence.

The beginning objectives were now the identification of a supermarket, of shopping in relation to family needs and wants, and of appropriate behavior in a commercial facility. Charts with visual aids for student manipulation were used frequently to develop reading skills.
The supermarket was defined as a large self-service store which sells food and other products which people use up quickly. A family's basic needs of food, housing and furniture, clothes and transportation were identified as having priority in the spending of a family's money. Roleplay helped identification of appropriate and inappropriate behavior.

Instruction, while still beginning with the concrete experience and the students sharing in the preparation of the food, now moved quicker to the abstract, the pictures and the words. The preparation and the tasting were effective motivational factors here for gaining and holding attention, as were miming of Television commercials, songs or rhymes that would relate to teenage interests.
Nutritional concepts were included, and the food group to which each product belonged was noted. The main ingredients of packages, and the

prices were read and further reinforced with seat work to develop the habit of getting information from the package. Budgeting skills were further introduced as choices were made on the basis also of price and quantity. Those students who could read prices were given instruction on how to use pocket adders, and this simple mechanical device proved another effective motivational factor.

While some students still shopped for multiple items using pictures as their lists, many wrote their own shopping lists, selecting from a growing number of identified products. They copied the names from word cards, labels on pictures, or from the real packages. They shopped for suitable breakfast foods, lunch foods or even just for a particular group such as fruit or vegetables or meat. It should be noted that the school Supermarket did not have any fresh produce, meat or bakery products. Also while most of the items on the shelves were real and full, the packages in the freezer (frozen vegetables, meat or juice) and in the refrigerator (milk, eggs and cheese etc) were empty. We did fill the milk cartons with water to increase the realism.

Artificial fruit has been obtained, then professionally wrapped and priced by a Pantry Pride Supermarket to begin a produce department, and attempts are being made to procure replicas of vegetables, breads, and meats from some supplier of display items. Meanwhile to make up for the lack of such items, various fresh breads were brought in for identification and shopping, as were vegetables and meat products.

The students went up and down the aisles, finding their products putting them in the shopping cart, then taking them to the check-out counter. It was here especially that money skills were reinforced. Students were asked to read prices on the items they placed on the counter, and on the receipts they received. Coins were identified and where possible, change

was counted. Those students who were using pocket adders checked their totals with that of the cash register and they showed their pleasure when they both agreed! They were aware that they had acquired a new skill.

After evaluation of their shopping, the students themselves returned the items to the supermarket. Top level students, group leaders, were often given the job of supervising this activity, checking for any misplaced items. The chance to learn a vocational skill, such as, stock clerk! to help them procure a job in a supermarket, was also an enticement for good listening and participation in the class.

These M.I.L. students appreciated the real-life characteristics of this resource class. Some of them linked the products of our lessons with those their family used, and others even took blank shopping lists home to use for their family.

All who have observed the students' performances are enthusiastic about this new teaching tool - the Supermarket Resource. Feedback has come from the Home room teachers, such as 'The children love to come to the supermarket' and 'It has given them the confidence to shop in a city supermarket.' We have only had one year of its use, yet already it has been used by over 200 students with a variety of handicaps, to acquire the functional skills needed to shop for the basic need - food! New skills and new ways to teach them are still being explored, many to be tried and tested in the school year 1978. For example, we could develop the use of Newspaper food advertisements and discount coupons, to improve their budgeting skills. As a testing devise, we could go on a trip to a nearby supermarket where students could shop, using shopping lists and money to obtain groceries for teachers and other members of the school staff.

A teacher/liaison worker with one of the resident institutions

and school #177 reports the positive effects of these institutionalized children coming to school now for almost a year. Apart from the intangible changes of a child's attitude of himself, there was now an increasing prospect of finding foster homes for these children. A child who goes to school daily is much more acceptable than a child who has never left an institution.

About twenty upper level students, M.L.L., have been receiving 'Transitional' type skills in a special instructional class to prepare them for functioning in a regular secondary or vocational school. They are now using Public Transportation instead of the Special school bus. Under a Work Study program, many have been working one or two hours per day in custodial or cafeteria duties and receiving payment for their work.

In summary, and evaluating the school year 1977/78 for the George F. McClechan School in general, and the Supermarket Resource in particular, teachers, administrators, and other faculty feel that despite many problems, it has been a year of success with a happy population of students learning and growing together.

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Supermarket Resource Teacher.